

*The Evangelical Attitude
Toward the Prayer Book*

By Carl E. Grammer



THE ANNUAL MESSAGE

OF

The Evangelical Education Society
of the Protestant Episcopal Church

*Showing incidentally the error of Bishop Manning
in regarding a Protestant View of the Ministry
as disloyal to our church's position.*



1939

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*The Evangelical Attitude Toward the Prayer Book

BY CARL E. GRAMMER

THE one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Prayer Book in a form revised to meet conditions in the United States must not be allowed to pass without expressions of gratitude and praise for this great achievement, and a more exact statement than has yet appeared of the attitude of Evangelicals toward this valuable heritage from the Church of England.

Undoubtedly the Evangelicals owed much to the Prayer Book. The zeal, other-worldliness, and ascetic tendency of early Evangelicals needed the union of piety and sobriety, of literary culture and manly good sense that characterizes that great manual of devotion and directory of worship.

Evangelical leaders like Charles Simeon in England and Dr. Milnor on this side of the water thoroughly appreciated the Book of Common Prayer. In the great Evangelical churches like St. George's, New York; St. Andrew's, Philadelphia; St. Peter's, Baltimore, and the Monumental Church, Richmond, of which Bishop Moore was rector, Morning Prayer, the Litany and the ante-Communion service

**A paper read at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Education Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, Pa., Oct. 19, 1939. It has been ordered to be distributed as the Society's annual message.*

were all read every Sunday morning and the Evening Prayer, unabbreviated, every Sunday evening.

Still the Evangelicals did not conceive of this mode of worship as the only acceptable way of approaching the throne of grace, and, much to the indignation of the high-churchmen of the type of Bishop Hobart and Bishop Whittingham, were willing to join in prayer meetings with other Protestants, and introduced extemporaneous prayers in their own mid-week devotional services and other informal gatherings. In spite of their frank rejection of some of its expressions they were devoted users and staunch upholders of our liturgy. But their spirit was filial, and not slavish. They realized that the Prayer Book was a human compilation, and was therefore capable of improvement, and appreciated that in mission work, and under special conditions abbreviations and other services were absolutely necessary. As an old Evangelical put it, the Prayer Book was a tool and not an agent; ministers are expert agents and must be entrusted with authority to manage the tool. They did not conceive of surplices, and prayers-out-of-a-book, however beautifully expressed, as indispensable means of winning recruits for the service of God. They thought that adornments should come after the foundations had been laid. They knew that a wedge cannot be inserted into a log butt-end first. One of the causes of the slow progress which our church made in the region west of the state of Ohio was undoubtedly the emphasis the high-church missionaries in that region laid upon minor points to the neglect of the weightier matters of repentance and faith, the requirements of morality and the fruits of the spirit. Where the foundations had been laid the Evangelicals did not fail to add the superstructure of reverent worship. They re-

alized the educational and devotional values of the Prayer Book.

Yet as we have remarked, the spirit was the free spirit of a son, and not the abject obedience of a slave or hireling. Although, like all schools of thought in the church in that day, they believed implicitly in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, after the Jewish conception of inspiration, and accepted the first chapter of Genesis as a scientific statement, and believed in the historicity of all parts of the Old Testament; nevertheless in their expositions of scripture they followed the spirit rather than the letter, and by the use of the allegorical method after the fashion of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians drew spiritual lessons from everything in the Old Testament—even from the red cord in the window of Rahab, the harlot, and the love songs of the book of Canticles. In truth they pumped the water of life that welled up in the New Testament, back into the Old Testament and then pointed to the saving truths thus derived as proofs of the inspiration of the older Scriptures.

In the case of the Prayer Book, however, they were more clear-sighted. At least the greatest among them were, indeed, the great majority were, until the unfortunate departure of the Reformed Episcopalians frightened those who remained and made them imagine that the way to prove their loyalty was to refrain from all criticism and endorse every particular of the volume. But this was not their attitude, in the great days when Evangelicals were reviving a church, half dead from the shock of its amputation from the Church of England and seriously handicapped in a new country on fire with patriotism by the large number of Tories among its clergy and laity in the north and especially by the unpatriotic and pro-British record and arrogant bearing of the mitred Seabury. (Let me state parenthetically

that this mitre can be seen in a small museum room attached to the chapel of Trinity College at Hartford, Conn.).

In those days of high enthusiasm they had the courage to ignore alike in the New Testament, and Prayer Book, some *obiter dicta*, some vestigia of Jewish legalism or pagan superstition that clung like barnacles to a ship. For example they had too strong a grasp on the doctrine of justification by faith to be troubled by the text in Titus which refers to baptism as "the washing of regeneration". They knew from personal experience that repentance and faith were the only essential conditions of the new birth.

In the same spirit they ignored as non-essentials some statements in the Office of Infant Baptism, and in the Ordination of a Priest. They accepted the Prayer Book as a whole; the spirit of the book they were convinced was thoroughly in accord with the spirit of the gospel. Later on, however, they began to have doubts about some statements, which that gifted strict-constructionist Secretary Rising of the E. K. S. called "Romanizing germs". Bishop Meade was no friend of sophistry and evasion, and his letters, published in his life by Bishop Johns show that in time he became much dissatisfied with some phrases in the office of Infant Baptism, (some of them have since been eliminated). Dr. Sparrow, Dean and professor of systematic divinity in the chief Evangelical Seminary in Virginia, taught that it was a great mistake to ascribe the same efficacy to the dedication of a child to God in baptism, as to the baptism of a believing adult. He held that the scriptural language about baptism only applied to adult baptism, which admittedly was at first the normal form. Neither of these theologians found any support in scripture for the divine-right theory of the episcopate. Both heartily disliked the English form of the ordination of priests: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the

office and work of a priest in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained, etc."

All the Evangelicals esteemed it an immense gain that an alternate form is provided in that office in the Prayer Book of the Protestant Episcopal church, viz.: "Take thou Authority to execute the Office of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed to thee by the Imposition of our hands. And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the Word of God, and of his Holy Sacraments; In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". This is the form used, we believe, in all ordinations in Virginia. It was certainly the form used in the time of Bishops Whittle and Randolph.

Unfortunately the entire freedom of this form from sacerdotalism is obscured by the fact that in the King James' Version the word priest is restricted to the Levitical Priesthood, and the Greek word *Presbuteros*, is translated Elder or Presbyter. The ordination service in the English Prayer Book antedates by 50 years the King James' Version. It was in the days of Queen Elizabeth that Archbishop Whitgift claimed in justification of the Prayer Book use of priest, as the equivalent of presbyter, that it was the best translation. "The very word itself," he wrote in his answer to Cartwright, "as it is used in the English tongue soundeth the word presbyter. As heretofore use has made it to be taken for a sacrificer, so will the use now alter that signification and make it to be taken for a minister of the gospel".

Unfortunately, as we have remarked, the Authorized Version made priest equivalent to a sacrificer, and restricted it to the Levitical ministers. This has led to much misunderstanding of the meaning of priest in the Prayer Book.

In the alternate form provided in 1789 by the Protestant Episcopal Church, it would have been much better to have conformed to the language of the Authorized Version, and adopted "Take thou authority to exercise the office of a Presbyter, etc." Doubtless the reason why the change was not made was that after the secession of the Non-Jurors and before the rise of Tractarianism in 1831 every school of thought admitted that presbyter and priest are synonymous in the Prayer Book. This is now so persistently ignored or contradicted that it is worthwhile to restate the true interpretation of the word, even at the risk of being tedious. The presence of that alternate form so frankly Protestant, so entirely free from sacerdotalism, is irrefutable proof that Bishop Manning speaks in disregard of the history and formularies of our Protestant Episcopal Church, when he opposes closer affiliation with the Presbyterians, on the ground that the Seabury doctrine of the Ministry and Sacraments is the official doctrine of our church and that concessions to the Presbyterians would be a betrayal of a trust that we have in keeping for Christendom. Two forms of ordination show that two theories are officially sanctioned. If Bishop Manning's view should prevail we shall ultimately lose our valuable alternate form of ordination of priests, for it is a standing protest against the Seabury doctrine.

Indeed we shall lose many other things, for the whole trend of scholarship is to regard these words about the power of the keys, and ministerial forgiveness of sins as insertions into the gospel by the ecclesiasticism of a later age. Those who realize that one of the greatest needs of the church is to simplify her creed, and cast aside the elements that were taken up by our faith as it passed through civilizations filled with pagan and legal conceptions, appreciate that these

vestiges of ancient superstitions and modes of thought need to be weeded out of the Prayer Book.

The truest loyalty to the adopters of our Prayer Book 150 years ago is exhibited not by treating their work as final, but by continuing their spirit of improvement, modification, and adaptation. They dropped the Athanasian Creed, and left the use of the Nicene Creed entirely optional. It was undoubtedly a step backward, a narrowing of the comprehensiveness of our church to require later on the recitation of the Nicene Creed on certain days, and a still greater mistake to adopt the usage that now prevails almost universally, even down in Virginia, of reciting the Nicene Creed at every Communion. Candidates for Baptism and Confirmation are only required to believe in the articles of the Christian Faith contained in the Apostles' Creed. This Creed of admission ought to be the Creed recited at the feast of fellowship and reconciliation. The learned laity know that in the Nicene Creed there are statements based on Greek philosophy and a misunderstanding of a text in the Fourth gospel, and as for the less learned, the more spiritually-minded and sincere they are, the less they like being required to recite a creed which they do not fully understand and which does not express the simple faith by which they live.

In no way, it seems to us, can we as representatives today of the spirit and essential teaching of the Evangelicals more fittingly celebrate this anniversary, than by calling on Evangelicals, and Liberals alike, Evangelical Liberals and Liberal Evangelicals, to conserve the gains of 1789 and to add to them in the spirit of loyalty, faith and wisdom which animated the organizers of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and was so potent in the great Evangelical leaders.

NOTE:—It is a pleasure to close this annual message

with an expression of gratification at the promotion that has come to two leading Evangelicals in England. Sir Thomas Inskip, since the death of Lord Brendford, the president of the National Church League, the great association of Evangelicals, has been appointed to the exalted office of the Lord High Chancellor of England and created by the King Viscount Caldecote of Bristol. He and the Prime Minister have nominated a prominent Evangelical clergyman, the Rev. C. M. Chavasse of St. Peter's Hall, Oxford, the son of that saintly Evangelical Bishop Chavasse of Liverpool to the bishopric of Rochester. The appointment has special significance as the first breach in the practice of the last ten years, which as the *Church Gazette* remarks, seemed intentionally designed to exclude from elevation to the Episcopal bench anyone who had opposed the 1927-8 revision of the Prayer Book. Mr. Chavasse was one of those who joined Joynson-Hicks and Sir Thomas Inskip in active opposition.

Speaking at a meeting three years later he re-affirmed his action saying: "as we believe in answer to many prayers the good hand of God saved the church from a fatal mistake three years ago, and prevented the revised Prayer Book from passing into law" "The speech from which this message is taken" continues the article in the *Church Gazette*, "was given in London in June, 1931, and was a powerful defence of the Articles of Religion against those who would ascribe them only a temporary, local and secondary importance, and an able indication of their authority as the official exposition of the Church of England." We congratulate our Evangelical friends in England upon these promotions. As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.

The Evangelical Education Society

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Organized November 3, 1862

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Founded to educate for the Ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church young men, who are in hearty sympathy with the Evangelical teaching of this Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer:

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